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April 28, 2004
Immediate Release

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Secretary Ron Curry Announces New Mexico Environment Department will help New Mexico Communities Prepare for Tough New Federal Arsenic Standard

(Santa Fe, NM) — New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary Ron Curry today announced that NMED's Drinking Water Bureau will work closely with communities throughout the state as they prepare to comply with new federal standards for arsenic in public water supplies. The Environment Department will support local communities as they examine how the new standard will affect their water systems and offer to hold public meetings on this important water quality issue.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) new arsenic standard will go into effect January 23, 2006. This standard lowers the maximum contaminant level (MCL) for arsenic in drinking water from 50 to 10 parts per billion (ppb).

"This new EPA standard will require significant work and expense in many local communities, and mayors, counselors and city managers across New Mexico are already concerned about how they'll manage," said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. "By beginning to work with these communities now on arsenic removal methods, variances and exemptions, NMED will help them get out in front of this issue and, hopefully, be well prepared by 2006."

Arsenic is a naturally occurring element found in New Mexico's ground water in many areas. Due to the elevated levels of arsenic in many of these areas, the new standard is expected to impact 90 of the state's approximately 1,400 public drinking water systems, including those serving the cities of **Albuquerque, Belen, Bernalillo, Carlsbad, Santa Fe, Espanola, Hobbs, Los Alamos, Portales, Santa Teresa, Socorro, and Sunland Park**. These 90 systems, which serve 756,000 customers or 41% of the state's total population, have water sources that will exceed the new arsenic MCL.

In the coming months NMED plans to seek out and work with these public water systems to achieve compliance with the new arsenic standard. To ensure that this outreach and assistance is done in the most productive way possible, NMED will hold public meetings around the State upon request to give water systems and the public an opportunity to comment on the outreach strategy prior to it being finalized. Formal written comments will also be accepted through May 10th.

NMED will also be discussing arsenic issues and the proposed strategy at the next Drinking Water Advisory Group (DWAG) meeting, from **8:30 am to 4 pm on Friday, April 30th**. The meeting will take place in Albuquerque in the **Auditorium of UNM's Science & Technology**

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Park, which is located at 800 Bradbury SE. DWAG meetings are held periodically throughout the state and are open to all water systems and the public.

The full State of New Mexico Arsenic Strategy is available on the Internet at:
<http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/dwb/dwag.html>.

EPA's new arsenic standard, which goes into effect on January 23, 2006, is the first update to this standard in 30 years. If a public water system believes it will have difficulty meeting this standard in a timely manner, it may apply with NMED for an exemption or variance. All requests for exemption or variance must be submitted to NMED by July 1, 2005. These requests must be submitted in writing to NMED's Drinking Water Bureau along with a complete application form. In most cases, a variance or exemption will grant up to three additional years to comply with the new standard.

Studies have linked long-term exposure to arsenic in drinking water to a variety of adverse health effects, including skin, bladder and lung cancers. EPA estimates that by lowering the standard to 10 ppb, 13 million Americans will be provided with additional protection against cancer and other health problems, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes, as well as neurological effects.

For further information, contact Fernando Martinez, Drinking Water Bureau Chief, NMED at (505) 827-1400, Extension 1019, Chuck Thomas, Drinking Water Bureau Program Manager at (505) 841-9476, or Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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